

TO THE SOUND OF AN ACCORDION

Trina and Nichole sat on the sidewalk in front of the Seven-Eleven, smoking cigarettes and drinking cokes, made-up, low-cut and barefoot. Older boys would try to pick up on them and they'd just act bored.

The little man shuffled out of the shadows across the parking lot, a thick black suitcase in his hand. He wore a dirty green windbreaker, a ten-day growth, a tattered watch cap, and one clouded eye. Nichole gave Trina a wide-eyed look of derision and disbelief. They both laughed.

He set the case down next to the paper machines, opened it, and gently lifted the accordion. It sighed happily as the man shouted something the girls couldn't understand. Then he played and sang.

Bill came out with his six-pack and stopped to listen to the little man working the squeeze box. The song was a mover, real fast tempo. He didn't understand the words. He tapped his foot and smiled, then walked over and asked the two teenaged girls if either of them would care to dance. They laughed. The blonde one said, "Gimmee a break. We like, you know, younger guys." Then they laughed some more. Bill stepped back, opened a beer, and listened to the music.

Carmen pulled into the parking lot and got out of her car. She'd worked the early shift at the topless place and she was tired. She just wanted to get a six-pack, go home and sit in front of the tube with her feet up. "What the hell is this?" she said to herself. A crowd was gathered around a small dirty man with an accordion. He said something and everybody laughed. The accordion wheezed. The man called across the parking lot to her, "COME ON OVER PRETTY LADY. DON'T BE SHY. I PLAY YOU A SONG." The people had turned to look at her. She liked his accent; French, she thought. She crossed the lot. The crowd parted and let her up front.

"This one's for you, my friend," said the little man, "It's called, Eh, Tite Fille," and he broke into it, arms pumping, singing loud. She couldn't understand the words but the music was beautiful. She started to dance. A man in a baseball cap pounded on the paper machine with an empty beer can. She spun around and put her hands over her head, clapping them to the beat, moving her hips. Her breasts quivered under her cut-off t-shirt, the light brown bottoms of them showing, just barely, under the shortened hem.

One of the men screamed, "AIEE," and another shouted, "PLAY THAT SQUEEZE BOX, BROTHER, PLAY THAT SQUEEZE BOX."

The little man did.

Trina threw her cigarette down and blew a long cloud of smoke into the air, looking disgusted. "God, this is so gross," she said. Her friend Nichole nodded in agreement, saying, "She's ugly, isn't she?"

A DRIBBLE, A DROPLET

Ruth and Ellis were involved in sex play: not intercourse, not procreation — sex play. They needed a post-vasectomy semen sample to give to the lab, to see if Ellis still had it.

Ellis held the little jar.

Ruth worked.

Ellis moaned and said, "Faster."

Ruth did something nasty, something Ellis had always loved. It made him crazy and it made him slow with the little jar. The first glob shot into the air like an amoeba on the wing, looping over Ruth's head and dropping down behind her onto the rug. She grabbed his hand and positioned it to catch the remains: a dribble, a droplet.

She held it up to the light as Ellis laid back and gasped on the bed. "Hope it's enough," she said.

Ellis drove it down to the lab. The white-coated woman held it up to the light, inspecting it like it was a shot of whiskey. She frowned, and seemed to be about to say something when Ellis cut her off: "Hope it's enough," he said, grinning sheepishly.

She shrugged her shoulders and took it to the back.

The lady lab techs got a kick out of his sample. They kept laughing at the jar with its little dribble in the bottom, saying, "What a stud, what a stud," and, "You don't wanna roll with this Ellis character, he'll blow your damned head off, he will."